

The Social construction of Tragedy in the Pashto Folk Romance narratives.

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Abstract:

The oral tradition of Pashto language has been a vital source in the formation of the collective social and historical consciousness, cultural education, imagination and particular forms of expression through poetics and prose. Romance narratives are one of the composite proses cum poetic genre of Pashto folklore which have been transferred from one generation to others over the period of hundreds of years. While stepping in the modern literacy and development arena, one can see that some of the particular romance stories have survived as part of the collective memory of most of the Pashtun pertaining to cultural and traditional backgrounds. This trickledown from the treasure of oral tradition of poetics and prose is due to its particular construction. Characterization and the very tragic ends of the lives of both the lovers. Tragedy or Gham is perceived as a compulsory value for life. The Tragedy occurred in the romance narratives is crafted over the social conditioning of women and the ideals of masculinity and male superiority, therefore one can see that in all the popular romance narratives woman has to die after her beloved to prove her true love. This paper is going to unpack the reality that, the tragedy in the popular romance stories is stemmed in the ethos and norms of social structure and its value system.

This paper unfolds the tragic patterns of the popular romance stories which are the great source of oral folkloric prose in

the Pashto language. The tragedy reflected in the popular romance stories posses commonalities in terms of the vantage position of male protagonists and his beloved heroin.. but it also posses a true replica of the construction of the social order, which awards specific and selected role to the different social classes and sexes.

Origin of the story:

Story is perceived as the very initial imaginary creation of human being after the origination of language. Max Muller the reckoned linguist has pointed that, “Language is the very initial creation in the entire universe, while mythology and legends come on the second numberⁱ”. In this context, the correlation of language with legends and stories is very essential and chronologically both are equally old.

Both language and myth have traveled side by side. Myth has enriched the language and as well has influenced the imaginary creation particularly on the folk tales including epic, romances, tragedy and comics. Dr Qazi Javed also connects both folk tales and the old mythological stories. Supporting the Muller’s hypothesis he also states that, “Mythology is old as compare to the folk talesⁱⁱ” but then he also finds its very usual connection in terms of both thoughts and techniques.

The Greek fables are rated as the initial imaginary creations of human being some of these are known as “Aesop fablesⁱⁱⁱ”. Analysis of the contents and techniques of the Greek fables indicates that it has laid strong foundation of the mythology as a collective human inheritance. Fables have grown through perpetual inter-cultural and intra-cultural interactions of the people. Tahir Afridi, the known short story writer of Pashto shares his views in this regards, “fables have grown through a rich

interaction of the people of diverse background, the carvan (seeking their trade markets and routs) used to settled and then for their imaginary and emotional catharsis, the story tellers¹ used to sit in the middle and then started the fable, they also played Daf², rabab³ along with story which created a space for story telling^{iv}.

The well known and reported Pashto folk romances starts from seventeenth century^v, while tallying the much stretched history of Pashto- in the Bakhtar (being migrated from Ariana Veija during 2500 BC^{vi}) as the third sister language of Awista⁴ and Sanscrit⁵ one can easily assess that a huge treasure of fables is extinct and has not become part of the collective memory and consciousness of Pashtoons. Ghani Khan the great poet and thinker of Pashto presents his views as, “The Pathans have no written history but they have thousands of ruins where they carved stones, tell their story to any one who would care to listen^{vii}”

The Oral Tradition and Pashto Folk Tales:

The oral tradition is as old as human being. People’s collective memory registers certain events and tales as part of its inheritance from the previous generation and then passes it on to the new generation with substantial subtraction and additions. Thus stories and poetics travel from place to place and generation to generation mainly through verbal communication.

The oral tradition of Pashto language has been a vital source of the creation of the collective social consciousness, imagination and

¹ Dastan Gou

² Locally made Drum mainly beaten by women in the recent dominant Pashtun culture

³ Rabab is a traditional Pashtun instrument mainly analogous to Gittar.

⁴ The Old Persian from indo-European group of languages

⁵ The sacred language of Hinduism enfolding the grand narrative and mythology of Hinduism

expression through poetics and prose. The various forms of poetry and prose have grown spontaneously and have diversified and magnified the canvas of Pashto literature. Story telling and narrations regarding the routine life are still part and parcel of the average traditional Pashtoons man and woman.

The evolution of story in the folk spaces has been very identical to the emergence and growth of the fabulous oral literature. The study of contents and techniques of the Pashto folk tales indicate immersed influences of various languages and cultures. The influence of Greek tragedy, Arabian Alf-laila⁶, Persian classics and Vedic fables of Hindu warriors^{viii} are felt and verified through various means.

Ghani Khan the reckoned Pashto poet and thinker have also quoted an analogy of the Pashtoon and Greece literature. But the framework of Pashto folk tales has been diversified through various sources and cultures. Sulleman Laiq verified this outcome in following words, “In spite of all characteristics of its formation, our (Pashto) folk stories are very identical to that of the other languages, it posses Romances, Epics, war narratives, religious tales and diverse other forms”^{ix}.

S. Sthorburn the known Orientalist has collected several short stories and has made his account entitled “Banu or our Afghan Frontier”. This is the very first book containing the folk stories of Pashtun. S. Sthorburn has classified these stories in the following manner.

Class1 Humorous and moral

Class2 Comic and Jocular

Class 3 Fables ^x

The Popular Folk Romances:

⁶ Alf-Laila is the legendary Arabian fable continued for thousand nights.

Some of the folk Romances have survived in the collective memory of Pashtoons through oral tradition of story telling and due to its compilations by Pashtoon scholars and some orientalists. These stories cater an interesting representation of the various geographical, socio-cultural and lingo-diction differences. But inspite of all these dissimilarities some of the folk romances are equally popular and contain social acceptance at all levels.

The folk tales that are evaluated in this paper are from different geographical and tribal backgrounds. Though one cannot presume the accurate period yet some of the poetic references pertaining to specific events and characters can be instrumental as historical determinants.

Adam Khan-Durkhaney also known as Rumeo Jullet of Pastho were from Bazdara-Malakand, they lived before the arena of the great scholar,poet and warrior, Khushal Khan, who instructed his son Sadar Khan Khattak to compile this romance story in a poetic form^{xi}. Momin Khan-Sherino are also reported as living during the Mughal reign. They belong to Kandahar^{xii}, similarly Yousaf Khan-Sherbano from one reference^{xiii} were from Swat, While Aseer Mangal reports them from Sawabi^{xiv}, Share Alam –Memooney from Bajawar^{xv} Musa Jan –Gul Makkai Harnai^{xvi} district adjacent to Ziarat and Loralai districts. Similarly Talib Jan-GulBashra, and Shadi Khan-Bebo are from the diverse geographical and tribal backgrounds.

The Folklorist Habibullah Rafi has deduced the history of Momin Khan from one of the Tappa⁷ by the Mughal princes whom he rescued from being entrusted to a Dracula.

⁷ Tappa is a popular folkloric form of poetry.

These stories are equally popular in the diverse areas where Pashtoons dwell, interestingly the Folk narrators/story tellers of different areas have translated the story into their own diction and have interknitted the story through the dominant poetic style. Like in some areas where Tappa is the dominant form of folklore one can see the poetic aspect in this particular form. This also reflects the significance of these romance stories which has created a culture of reproducing and reshaping the deep romantic experience into their own style, one can also deduce that its has motivated the general public to be a poet and story teller.

While a holistic study of the folk narratives/stories will reveal that these posses the characteristics of Drama, Novel and Short story at a time. As novels deal with postulates, short story gives an imaginative dynamics to the story and drama infuses soul in the dead characters of the story^{xvii}.

The art of story telling is stemmed in the Pashtoon tradition, one can easily guess it through the detailed sharing of people when they return from another place or they even come from their daily duties in other towns.

The analogy, that every Pashtoon is a poet also fits here, we can easily say that an average Pashtoon male and female are the good narrators and story tellers.

The folk romances are mainly shared by the specific and some how professional story tellers. One of the key qualities of a good story teller is his excellence of having a good throat for signing and skill of playing the local music instruments. The listeners get around the story teller; one of the persons is assigned to keep the story on the track that is mainly called Shepard, in terms of guide. The story is consisting of narrations and

poetics some times the over all story is shared in the poetic framework with singing.

Professor Muhammad Nawaz Tahir in his research paper on “Adam Khan-Durkhanai elaborated, “this is a particular form of tragedy which has found space in the hearts of all the children, young and old male and female. People share this story at various places like in the *Hujra*, *Dera* and around the heating fire, during journey or in the common sitting this story is listened with equal zeal. Adherence to such tragic romance is the true reflection of the nature of the emotions of Pashtuns^{xviii} .

The listeners most of the time in the traditional gathering spaces (*hujra*, *baitak*, *wattak*)⁸ used to weep along with the progression of the story towards the catastrophic conclusion. The observers and listeners reports that the sighs of the listeners rises when the end of this particular tragic romance stories come. The romances are concluded with prayers for lover’s souls.

Similarities in Folk romances:

The progression and construction of story follows an identical trajectory. A heart breaking event enters in a community through a reporter with required zeal, and then the story is further formulated through the people’s deep feelings of Gham (tragedy). One of the identical points in all the stories is that almost all the popular romance stories posse’s is deepest feelings of Gham and have the very tragic ends to the lives of both of the lovers. Gham is one of the core determinants of folk romances popularity while the other core determinant is the particular pious and virtuous portrait of the Heroine of these romances. Almost all

⁸ The traditional spaces of gathering and hospitality named differently in different areas

the heroes except Talib Jan are warriors and proven their skills and courage as warrior and brave.

Almost in the entire protagonist has to travel to other areas especially for increasing their power, wealth and influence while winning over their rivals or equalizing with the socially higher class

Habibullah Rafi, the reckoned Pashto folklorist has quoted in his account on the folklore.

Momin Khan has finally intended to go to Hindustan for increasing his power and wealth, his fiancé assures him a firm commitment.

Do not lose your heart while being abroad

My love will be for you till my death^{xix}

Musafari pa jama xdra ka

Khulgai mi sta da ka za khawri sam maiena

The Esthetics of Gham in Folklore;

Gham is not created for the unwise purpose

It is the standard differentiating the gallant and coward⁹. KHUSHAL

KHAN KHATAK

Tragedy (*Gham*) is not an unusual phenomenon in the lives of the ordinary Pashtoons, like an Bedouin Arab is familiar with desert, camel and thirst similarly a common Pashtoon is familiarized with the experience of Gham. Gham is mainly taken as a value and dealing the tragic consequences of life, a common man expresses it in a particular poetic form. Therefore one can see the very deepest feelings of the tragic experiences in the folklore poetry and prose.

⁹ (Gham e Bey Hikmatta na day paida Karey-
Da Namard aw Mard pa munz ki Gham Mahaq dai).

Gham has been one of the socially accepted values, the folk proverbs and expression in the folk literature also reveals that it must be acknowledged as one of the closest companion of one's life, therefore the tragic romance stories in this context are very much highlighted. The story teller strives to connect the listener to their own stories therefore they can easily contextualize the relevance of these stories with their lives and experiences of *Gham*. The ethnographer Benedicte Grima (1992) shares her findings regarding *Gham*, " *Gham* is a major criterion among Pashtun critics, writers and audiences, when discussing the plot in novels, romances, television or radio drama, folktales and poetry, as one Pashtun scholar (Purdal Khan Khatak) put it, "TV Dramas are good example, if they do not have a lot of suffering, then we say they are unnatural we do not appreciate that^{xx}".

Gham/tragedy is taken as a source of healing from within. The very popular folk poetic genres of *Tapa*, *Kakarai Ghari* and the poetics of the romance stories show very deep connection of these people with *Gham* as a source behind the production and creations of immense value of literature. Reckoned Scholar Qalander Momand in his interview with Benedicte Grima for her ethnographic study has put that, "Man's greatness is judged from the point of view of his *Gham*, not of his joy but his reactions to tragedy make him great^{xxi}

The beauty and esthetics of *Gham* is also acknowledged and suggested by the classical Pashto poets like, Rehman Baba, Hamid Baba, Kazim Khan Shaida and Mirza Hanan Barakzai. On the famous couplet of Mirza Hanan Barakzai is as under

Until the heart is not broken, love cannot enter into it

Like the nib of the pen, takes ink while broken down^{xxii}

Similarly Rehman Baba has rightly expressed about the nexus of Gham and poetics as compulsory entities for each other.

It is a law that sighs are generated through pain

Otherwise, Rehman had nothing to do with poetry¹⁰.

Portrait of the Virtuous Heroine of Romances;

Contrary to the beautiful seductive women in the grand narratives (The Arabian folk story told in 1000 nights), Qisa-e-Chahar Darwesh¹¹ or Bagh W Bahar^{xxiii12} The heroines of the romances reflect a perfect picture of the women who fulfills the standards of Pashtunwali. Therefore one cannot see their seductiveness and lust for fulfilling sexual desires. Shadi Khan one of the representative Romance heroes leaves his land because his lover refused to carry out any form of romance which is perceived an illicit relation socially.

While comparing the romances of Pashto folklore, one also finds that there are minimum contribution of the supernatural forces and magical influences over the lives of the protagonist and his lover. Analysis of the Romance narratives reveals that the stories are knitted over the canvas of the social structure and ideals of the Pashtunwal¹³ which demands demonstration of high character and ethos from the protagonist and his beloved fiancé. There are several romance stories, but the romance narratives that are concluded with particular tragic ends have become part of the collective social memory.

¹⁰ Da dastoor dai chi la darda Zgirwai Khixi'

Kane Sa Da Rehamn La Shaerai

¹¹ The reckoned fable "Story of the four saints" transmitted from Persian to Urdu and Pashto

¹² Garden and spring

¹³ Pashtunwali is the cultural code of life, determined and constructed by the Pashtun society over the years, which covers detailed jurisprudence, values and norms of the Pashtuns.

Nexus of Tragedy, Romances and Social Structure;

One can see that the woman lovers die after their beloved male protagonists, Durkhaney dies after having a visit to the grave of Adma Khan in Baz Dara-Malakand, while her death over the grave of Adam Khan is also acknowledged by Payo Khan the anti-Protagonist and rival of Adam Khan who forcibly strived to get marriage with Durkhaney.

Similarly Mosa Jan is killed by King Suhail who forcibly abducted Gul Makai. She put forward a condition for wedding the Suhail if he builds a tomb over the grave of her beloved. Suhail orders and the tomb is built. Gul Muhammad Noori compiler of the romance story has written it in following manner,

“In the morning, King Suhail along with his men took Gul Makai to show her the glorious tomb he made over the grave of Mosa Jan. Gul Makai entered the Ziarat¹⁴, and made a cold sigh, and fell over the grave of Mosa Jan, she prayed from Allah for ending her life and as she was the true lover so her pray was admitted, Suhail’s mouth remain open with sorrow and surprise, it is said that she is burried beside Mosa Jan^{xxiv}”.

In the case of Talib Jan and Gul Bashra and Yousf Khan Sherbano both the couples of lovers get through series of hardships and then get marriage, but the tragic romances only survives when the lovers die their hearts filled with desires. Talib Jan was to complete his religious scholarship, he lefts his loving princes wife and goes for seeking knowledge, after completing his Scholarship he starts coming back to Gul Bashra but the hardships of continuous journey makes him ill and finally dies. Gul Bashra like her sisters woman lovers fell upon his grave and leaves this mortal world.

¹⁴ Ziarat is the grave of a saint or spiritual person.

The tragedy of Yousaf Khan and Momin Khan is alike when one lacks man power and wealth to protect his family, lover and land, while the later lacks wealth to pay *Walwar*¹⁵ (dowry) for his beloved Sherin, spelled as Sherino. Therefore both of them traveled Hindustan where they demonstrated high skills and courage as wise warriors and leaders. In the rewards of his services the King of the particular state gave him wealth and men power to fulfill their right desires.

Yousaf Khan took over his cousin at the day of the Sherbano's by force wedding to Yousaf's cousin but in the very initial days of their marriage he dies while hunting in the stormy night. Momin Khan comes with *Walwar* the dowry money but makes haste while not having a control over his emotions. He reaches at night, stay his men outside the village, jumps over the castle of Zabardast Khan the Sherino's elder brother and go straightly to the bed of his fiancé Sherino who is sleeping deeply and is surrounded by her seven brothers. He strive to kiss her meanwhile she yelps and Zabradast Khan aims at him with his long knife, Momin Khan dies and Shrinno along with Gul Ghuttai the daughter of the King of an Indian state also dies at the eve of the burial of the Momin Khan.

Shadi Khan and Beabo the cousin lovers are separated due to the ego of Beabo's parents, Shadi Khan leaves home and goes Asfahan where he encounters with another woman Sharin who fells in love with him, he strives to avoid her and escapes from there to a desert where he dies, Beabo becomes ill and requested her father to get her to Asfahan, she reaches the place where Shadi Khan dies and then an end to her life concludes the story.

¹⁵ *Walwar* is the money to be paid by the groom family to the family of bride.

The tragedy in Folk Romance narratives of Pashto is identical to the tragic frameworks of the mainstream love stories of Arabic and Persian languages like the eternal stories of Laila-Majnoon and Shareen –Farhad. But there are some general differences mainly in the nature tragedy and gender roles. Both Majnoon and Farhad dies after their Beloved while all the woman lovers like Gul Bashra, Gul Makai, Durkhaney, Sherbano and Beabo are died after their beloved man.

The desires of the entire Pashtoon women to die after their lover are social norms, particularly woman who loves with their husband cannot think beyond their existence as countless miseries opens after the husband eyes are shut. Like the tragic custom of Satai in orthodox Hindu faith in which wife is doomed to ablaze herself with her died husband, the inner feelings of the Pashtoon romance heroine are also the same but she gave her soul with her spiritual power and the Karishma of true love. Analysis of the tragic romances and the particular role adopted by woman lovers it is interesting to know that the co-incidence of issuing all the same role determines demands of the social order and social role of woman.

From the study of the romance stories, Anthropologist Charles Lindholm has deduced that “In death romance lives while in marriage romance is dead” as quoted by Benedicte Grima (1992) in her ethnographic study. The death of the women after their beloved is a common drop scene of the romance tragedies. It is a social demand from woman to prove her love as cultural stereotypes are woman is blamed as hypocrite, disloyal and wicked.

When we analyze the romance narratives, one finds interesting similarities, presence of a woman or young girl is essential in all the

stories, which is a bone of contention amongst various male lovers. Like in Drama or Noval one finds both tragic and comic aspects similarly we can see the very tragic end of the story with the death of one of the lovers which causes the death of the second. They are burried separately but while digging graves some days later they are found together^{xxv}...

Conclusion:

The collective memory of Pashtoons possesses a short span of its history while an unprecedented treasure of folklore is either deformed or extinguished. The folk tales are still great sources for unpacking the cultural and historical questions. The contemporary social scientists strongly believe that folk tales posses the treasures of meaning for understanding and unpacking the social systems and its construction.^{xxvi}

The Pashto folk romances are the true reflections of the social order, in which particular roles are assigned and expected to be displayed through the acts of their protagonist. The demise of all the Heroine after the tragic death of their lovers is perceived as a standard of Wafa (loyalty to the male lover) and one cannot find a popular romance story which does not fulfill the typical characterization and patterns. Hero is a complete warrior and representative of the traits of Pashtunwali, while heroine is also conditioned to the particular values and virtue. Tragedy only completes when woman dies for her lover.

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